

# FOOD for Thought



Many of the enquires I receive are from people concerned with solving a particular health problem; "I have no energy, what can I take?" "I have breast tenderness, what can I take?" "I have eczema or chronic headaches or splitting fingernails or muscle cramping, what can I take?" I call this the "pharmaceutical mentality" and it traps people into approaching health and diet from the standpoint of cure rather than prevention. It also creates the wrong impression that you can solve a complex issue without much effort provided you find the right pill.

Unless you are one of the very few with an overt vitamin or mineral deficiency, diet and supplement are more about prevention and optimum health than about cure. Adding this or that ingredient to a poor diet may help plug some holes but if you want optimum health the foundation needs to be solid. This is one reason why I often disagree with those who say they don't need supplements because they eat a good diet. The better your foundation diet, the better your body will utilise supplements to achieve optimum results. This is where the quality of the supplement comes into play.

Another side to this coin is that many diets are filled with ingredients that can create problems instead of solving them. In a mainly unprocessed diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, lean meat, fish, eggs and dairy foods, the essentials are being topped up with every meal and your body builds reserves for stressful times. In a mainly processed food diet, the vitamin and mineral content is often lower, and important complex molecules may be replaced by simple starches and sugars, rancid fats and oils and coagulated proteins. Not only do these processed ingredients replace essential nutrients, they can increase your nutrient requirement to the point where supplementation is necessary to maintain the status quo. Put another way, what you do eat may make supplements more important and necessary than what you don't eat.

I know we can't go back to the days when milk came from your cow, eggs from a tiny shed behind the house and vegetables from a garden tended by the whole family. On the other hand, technology and processing have made the food supply safer and more diverse than ever before. We need to embrace the best qualities of both these worlds realising that foods must be produced for their nutritional value rather than appearance and keeping qualities and if people are going to continue to demand fast foods, new technologies must be found to make them more nutritious.



## Greetings...

It would be rare to pick up a magazine these days and not find an article about nutrition and diet. Just as important as the contents of the article is the creation of public awareness that this subject deserves more attention along with the well publicised health risks of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, stress and obesity.

Unfortunately many still approach diet from the standpoint of taste and convenience and you are the ones I wish to reach in these few paragraphs. Even if you believe all the talk about diet and supplements is just marketing hype, you may be more interested if we look at it from the standpoint of saving money. Not just the money you pay for personal health care but the taxes you pay to support an overwhelmed health care system.

I recently found an interesting case study involving six thousand workers and their families conducted by a health care consulting firm to determine how much money could be saved by a healthier lifestyle. It should come as no surprise that attention to health risk factors over a three year period significantly reduced the cost and number of health care claims. What may surprise you, however, is the lifestyle change that resulted in the greatest savings.

(continued overleaf)

## NUTRITION NOTES

### In A Pinch ?

People with high blood pressure are aware of the debate over salt and the need to lower their sodium intake. Women who eat a lot of salt ( 6 grams plus a day) should be aware that they do so at calcium's expense. Healthy kidneys get rid of the excess sodium but in doing so lose calcium and over the years that may contribute to osteoporosis. If its true that 75% of the salt we consume is in processed foods, it is very difficult to alter our salt intake unless we cut down on processed foods, tinned foods, take-away, etc. Ref Aut01/1

### Cholesterol's Multiple Roles

Cholesterol is an important lipid and in spite of its bad press, is essential to keep you healthy. Cholesterol is involved in repairing cell membranes, manufacture of Vitamin D and creating important hormones like oestrogen and testosterone. There are several types of lipids and cholesterols that are transported in the blood to various sites where they are needed. LDL cholesterol becomes dangerous when it penetrates artery walls and interacts with free radicals in a process called oxidation. For those concerned about cholesterol and heart health make sure you have a good daily intake of protective anti-oxidants and listen to your doctor. Ref Aut01/2

### Bone Behaviour

The 206 living bones in your body constantly undergo a process called remodelling. Bone mass in women peaks at 25 to 30 years and in men at 30 to 35 years. The remodelling process continues but as you age, breakdown outpaces build-up and bone becomes less dense. One key strategy to reduce the risk of osteoporosis is to maximise your bone density through healthful eating and weight bearing exercise before the process begins. A 5% gain in bone mass can reduce the risk of osteoporosis by 40%. The nutrients to "bone up" on are calcium, Vitamin A, Vitamin D, Vitamin C, Magnesium, Zinc, Boron and protein. Ref Aut01/3

### Diabetes on the Increase

Type II or non-insulin dependent diabetes is a condition where people do not produce enough insulin or their cells simply do not respond to it. This results in high blood sugar levels that can damage nerves, eyes, kidneys and the heart. Poor lifestyle habits are linked to 50 to 80% of all cases of Type II diabetes. Prevention is aided by eating a balanced diet, maintaining a healthy bodyweight and taking regular exercise. The trace mineral Chromium is showing promise in several studies to aid in control of blood sugar levels. Ref Aut01/4

### No Lucerne for Lupus

Alfalfa sprouts may be bad news if you have one of the autoimmune problems like Lupus. These tasty little sprouts contain an immune stimulating compound which may cause flare-ups in autoimmune conditions. People with Lupus and related conditions benefit from a diet high in antioxidants Vitamin E, beta-carotene and selenium. Also recommended are calcium and omega 3 fatty acids from flaxseed and evening primrose oil. Ref Aut01/7

### Beautiful Food

I recently saw a book by a monk who holds that eating should be a spiritual experience that gives you a moment of calm during the day. Food is about nourishing your mind/body rather than grabbing a bite on your way to the next meeting. Take a little time, be quiet and mindful of your next meal and you might be surprised how much more you will enjoy the experience. Ref Aut01/8

### Secret To Longevity

The secret is at the grocery store but it is not in the aisle where the chips and soda lurk. The Journal of the American Medical Association April 2000 reported women who ate diets high in fruits, vegetables, grains and lean meats were 30% less likely to die prematurely from any cause than those who didn't eat a good diet. The secret is to begin early since signs of premature ageing are showing up in teenagers and young adults. Further evidence of the importance of educating children in healthy eating habits before the fast food marketing hype gobbles them up. Ref Aut01/9

### Greetings cont.

Eating habits topped the list that included cholesterol level, smoking, stress, obesity, blood pressure and not enough exercise. An index of dietary risk factors was established and those who scored well on the index had a 41% reduction in health care claims and expenses.

We are accustomed to discussing eating habits and supplements in terms of the individual to lower the risk of degenerative disease, reduced stress and create more energy. Perhaps it is time to broaden our perspective and view better eating habits as a sound business practice for our communities and the entire nation.

If there is anyone out there with some political clout looking for ways to reduce the high cost of health care now and in the future, a few programs that teach good eating habits could have benefits far beyond saving money.

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